

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L QUITO 2123

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, EC

SUBJ: CONTROVERSY OVER JOURNALISTS ALLEGED TO BE ON GOE PAYROLL

REF: QUITO 2015

1. SUMMARY: OPPONENTS OF GOE HAVE PROVOKED CONTROVERSY WITH POTENTIALLY SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES FOR REPUTATIONS OF ANUMBER OF PROMINENT LOCAL JOURNALISTS BY PUBLISHING A LIST OF CORRESPONDENTS AND BROADCASTERS ALLEGED TO BE ON GOE PAYROLL. PUBLICATION OF LIST AT THIS TIME CONFORMS TO INDICATIONS PROVIDED TO EMBASSY BY CIVILIAN OPPONENTS OF REGIME OVER PAST THREE WEEKS THAT EFFORT WOULD BE MOUNTED TO DISCREDIT GOE THROUGH PUBLICATION OF EMBARRASSING DOCUMENTS. GOE HAS MEANWHILE DENIED THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE LIST AND DENOUNCED ITS PUBLICATION AS A MANEUVER BY THE "OLD TRAFFICKERS IN POLITICAL MANIPULATION." END SUMMARY.

2. THE NATIONAL SECRETARIAT OF PUBLIC INFORMATION, (SENDIP) THE PROPAGANDA ARM OF THE GOE AND PARTICULARLY OF THE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENCY, TOOK OUT A ONE-HALF PAGE ADVERTISEMENT MARCH 26 IN QUITO'S LEADING DAILY EL COMERCIO TO DENY THE AUTHENTICITY OF LISTS OF ECUADOREAN JOURNALISTS PURPORTEDLY IN THE PAY OF THE GOVERNMENT.

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3. THE ADVERTISEMENT CAME OUT SIMULTANEOUSLY WITH THE LATEST

EDITION OF NUEVA, A LEFTIST MONTHLY MAGAZINE, WHICH IN ADDITION TO A SUBSTANTIAL SECTION ON "THE CIA IN ECUADOR," PRINTED TWO OF THE LISTS BEING CIRCULATED, UNDER THE HEADLINE "JOURNALISTS 'PAID' BY THE GOVERNMENT."

4. NEITHER OF THE LISTS IS IDENTICAL WITH ONE MADE AVAILABLE TO THE EMBASSY IN DECEMBER, DATED SEPT. 25, 1974, ALTHOUGH ALL APPEAR ON MINISTRY OF PUBLIC HEALTH STATIONERY AND ARE PURPORTED TO ORIGINATE FROM THE OFFICE OF THAT MINISTRY'S DEPUTY COMPTROLLER. THE LISTS PUBLISHED IN NUEVA INCLUDE SOME IMPORTANT CHANGES FROM THE EMBASSY COPY WITH THE INCLUSION OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL RADIO ASSOCIATION AND THE NATION'S LEADING EDITORIAL CARTOONIST.

5. THE SENDIP STATEMENT SAID THE DOCUMENTS WERE "FALSE AND ANONYMOUS," AND WERE ISSUED TO "GIVE CREDENCE TO THIS CALUMNY, AND TO CREATE SUSPICION REGARDING THE MORAL AND PERSONAL INTEGRITY OF THE JOURNALISTS INCLUDED IN THESE LISTS." SENDIP WAS LISTED AS A MAJOR CONTRIBUTOR, ALONG WITH THE MINISTRY OF GOVERNMENT.

6. THE SENDIP ADVERTISEMENT SAID: "THIS FORM OF DISPUTE THAT SEEKS TO DISCREDIT JOURNALISTS WHO DO NOT FAVOR SEDITIOUS MANEUVERS IS A REMNANT OF THE OLD STRATEGY OF POLITICAL CONCLAVES, ACCUSTOMED TO USING THE PRESS AND JOURNALISTS AS 'CANNON FODDER' TO CARRY FORTH BATTLES THEY THEMSELVES ARE INCAPABLE OF FIGHTING WHO ENJOY THE VICTORIES WON BY THE PRESS AND ITS WORKERS FACING OLIGARCHICAL AND UNPOPULAR GOVERNMENTS. TOTALLY STRIPPED OF POPULAR BACKING, EVEN LACKING THE IMAGINATION TO CREATE NEW NORMS OF POLITICAL CONDUCT, THE OLD TRAFFICKERS IN POLITICAL MANIPULATION HAVE NOT FOUND ANY OTHER WAY TO MAKE THEMSELVES NOTICED THAN TO HIDE BEHIND JOURNALISTS TO UTILIZE THEM AS INSTRUMENTS OF OPPOSITION AND THUS ACHIEVE WHAT THEY COULD NEVER GET BY THEMSELVES, SINCE THEY HAVE NOT EVEN A TRACE OF SUPPORT AMONG THE MASSES NOR DO THEY HAVE A DEFINED IDEOLOGY."

7. SENDIP CONCLUDES BY PRAISING JOURNALISTS FOR THEIR HELP IN CREATING A NEW NATIONAL CONSCIENCE, AND REAFFIRMS ITS CONFIDENTIAL

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RESPECT FOR THEIR PROFESSION AND PERSONAL INTEGRITY.

8. NUEVA INCLUDED A FLYER IN ITS ISSUE, CONTAINING A REPRINT FROM THREE PROMINENT EL COMERCIO JOURNALISTS -- ITS DEPUTY DIRECTOR, GENERAL MANAGER AND EDITORIAL CARTOONIST -- DENYING THEIR PARTICIPATION IN ANY GOVERNMENT HANDOUTS. THE DENIAL ORIGINALLY APPEARED IN EL COMERCIO.

9. MEANWHILE, JORGE ZALDUMBIDE, PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL ANNOUNCERS SOCIETY AND UNTIL RECENTLY NEWS CHIEF AT CHANNEL 8 (QUITO), TOOK OUT A SMALL ADVERTISEMENT IN THE SUNDAY EL COMERCIO TAKING A TONGUE-IN-CHEEK POKE AT THE LISTS. THE AD OFFERD A 50 PERCENT COMMISSION "TO ANYONE WHO HELPS ME TO RECOVER THE INCOME I HAVE BEEN RECEIVING FROM THE GOVERNMENT IN MY CAPACITY AS TELEVISION JOURNALIST, ACCORDING TO SOME 'LIST-MAKERS' THROUGH WHOSE ASSISTANCE I HAVE JUST LEARNED WHAT I HAVE BEEN LOSING." IT ADDS: "SPECIAL OFFER FOR THE LIST-MAKERS: SINCE THE CURRENT GOVERNMENT HAS MORE THAN THREE YEARS IN POWER, THE SUM IS APPETIZING AND I OFFER YOU 75 PERCENT: ATTENTION COMPTROLLER AND MINISTRY OF GOVERNMENT: WITH THE MONEY 'I HAVE BEEN RECEIVING' SOMEONE IS HAVING A GOOD TIME."

10. COMMENT: THERE IS NO WAY TO DETERMINE THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE LISTS, BUT IT IS NOT UNUSUAL FOR LATIN AMERICAN (OR OTHER) GOVERNMENTS TO PAY JOURNALISTS. IT IS LIKELY THE GOE WOULD HAVE PREFERRED TO IGNORE THE SITUATION, BUT WAS FORCED INTO MAKING A STATEMENT BECAUSE OF THE PUBLICATION OF THE LISTS BY NUEVA. WHATEVER THE TRUTH MAY BE, IT IS UNLIKELY THE GOE WILL ALLOW THE PRESS FULL REIGN, AND WILL CONTINUE TO TAKE STEPS TO ASSURE THAT ITS POINT OF VIEW APPEARS IN THE MEDIA.

11. AS FOR WHAT MIGHT HAVE MOTIVATED PUBLICATION OF LISTS AT THIS TIME, GIVEN THE FACT THAT LIST (OR LISTS) HAVE BEEN KICKING AROUND FOR AT LEAST SIX MONTHS, SEVERAL CIVILIAN OPPONENTS OF REGIME HAVE INDICATED TO EMBASSY OVER PAST THREE WEEKS THAT THEY PLANNED TO SEEK TO DISCREDIT REGIME THROUGH PUBLICATION OF EMBARRASSING DOCUMENTS AND OTHER FORMS OF PUBLIC ATTACK, AS WELL AS CIRCULATION OF ANONYMOUS HANDBILLS. THIS AS WELL AS CONFIDENTIAL

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PRESS ATTACKS REPORTED REFTEL CLEARLY FORM PART OF THAT CAMPAIGN. IT IS DOUBTFUL, HOWEVER, THAT ANY OF THESE EFFORTS ARE LIKELY TO HAVE SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON GOE AND, WITHOUT A PROMINENT STANDARD BEARER AROUND WHOM TO REALLY, THESE CIVILIAN EFFORTS AMOUNT TO NOTHING MUCH MORE THAN GOOD OLD FASHIONED MUCKRAKING.
BREWSTER

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